

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
NEWS ANALYSIS NO. 1-1587  
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# 94TH CONGRESS -- A REPORT CARD

ANNCR:

THE 94TH CONGRESS HAS COMPLETED ITS TWO-YEAR SESSION, AND THE MEMBERS HAVE LEFT WASHINGTON FOR HOME WHERE MOST ARE PREPARING FOR NEXT MONTH'S ELECTIONS. CHARLES MEDD EXAMINES THE LATEST CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

VOICE:

THE NINETY-FOURTH CONGRESS ARRIVED IN WASHINGTON BRIMMING WITH HOPE AND PROMISE, AND CLAIMING FOR ITSELF A SPECIAL MANDATE FOR CHANGE. IN RESPONSE TO WATERGATE, ANGRY VOTERS ELECTED NEARLY ONE HUNDRED NEW REPRESENTATIVES, MOST OF THEM YOUNGER AND MORE LIBERAL THAN THOSE THEY REPLACED. THERE WAS MUCH TALK OF REFORM, OF CORRECTING NOT JUST THE WAY CONGRESS ITSELF FUNCTIONS BUT THE ENTIRE GOVERNMENT AS WELL. AFTER TWO YEARS, HOWEVER, THE LEGISLATORS LEFT THIS CAPITAL CITY PRETTY MUCH THE WAY THEY FOUND IT AND RETURNED TO FACE THE VOTERS WITH VERY LITTLE TO BRAG ABOUT.

THERE WERE OF COURSE SOME SUCCESSES. THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES MODIFIED ITS TIME-HONORED SENIORITY SYSTEM TO ALLOW NEWER MEMBERS A LARGER SHARE OF AUTHORITY. THE SENATE ALSO TOOK STEPS TO REDISTRIBUTE LEGISLATIVE POWER, AND TOGETHER THE TWO HOUSES ENACTED THE SO-CALLED "SUNSHINE LAW" THAT OPENS MORE OF GOVERNMENT TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY.

BUT BEYOND THESE CHANGES, THE LIST OF DOMESTIC ACHIEVEMENTS IS INDEED MODEST. AFTER MUCH TALK ABOUT TAX REFORM, CONGRESS PASSED A LAW THAT MOST EXPERTS SAY IS DISTINGUISHED MORE BY ITS COMPLEXITIES THAN THE TAX RELIEF IT OFFERS. THERE WAS ALSO MUCH TALK ABOUT ENERGY PROBLEMS BUT VERY LITTLE IN THE WAY OF REMEDIAL

LEGISLATION. CONGRESS DID ENACT A NUMBER OF BILLS DEALING WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES, BUT THE VAST MAJORITY WERE TURNED ASIDE BY PRESIDENTIAL VETOES.

AS FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, THE NINETY-FOURTH CONGRESS CONTINUED TO COMPETE WITH THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH FOR A LARGER ROLE IN POLICY MATTERS, A CHANGE REFLECTING CONGRESSIONAL DISPLEASURE WITH VIETNAM. BUT DESPITE ITS MORE ASSERTIVE POSTURE, CONGRESS REJECTED MAJOR WHITE HOUSE REQUESTS ONLY ONCE WHEN IT RULED OUT ANY AMERICAN INVOLVEMENT IN ANGOLA. OTHERWISE THE LEGISLATORS ACCEPTED THE FORD ADMINISTRATION'S BASIC POLICY OUTLOOK, AND SO DEMONSTRATED BY ACCEPTING THE PRESIDENT'S CALL FOR INCREASED MILITARY SPENDING.

THE NINETY-FIFTH CONGRESS, TO BE ELECTED NOVEMBER SECOND, WILL HAVE A DECIDEDLY NEW LOOK, MAINLY BECAUSE A LARGE NUMBER OF OLDER MEMBERS HAVE DECIDED TO RETIRE. MOST OBSERVERS SEE THE DEMOCRATS RETAINING CONTROL OF BOTH HOUSES. AND WHILE THEY ALSO SEE CONTINUED EFFORTS AT SELF-REFORM AND CONTINUED PRESSURE FOR MORE AUTHORITY OVER FOREIGN POLICY, THE NEXT CONGRESS IS EXPECTED TO BEGIN WITH MORE MODESTY AND PERHAPS A MORE REALISTIC SENSE OF WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE TWO YEARS AHEAD.

GH/RCS